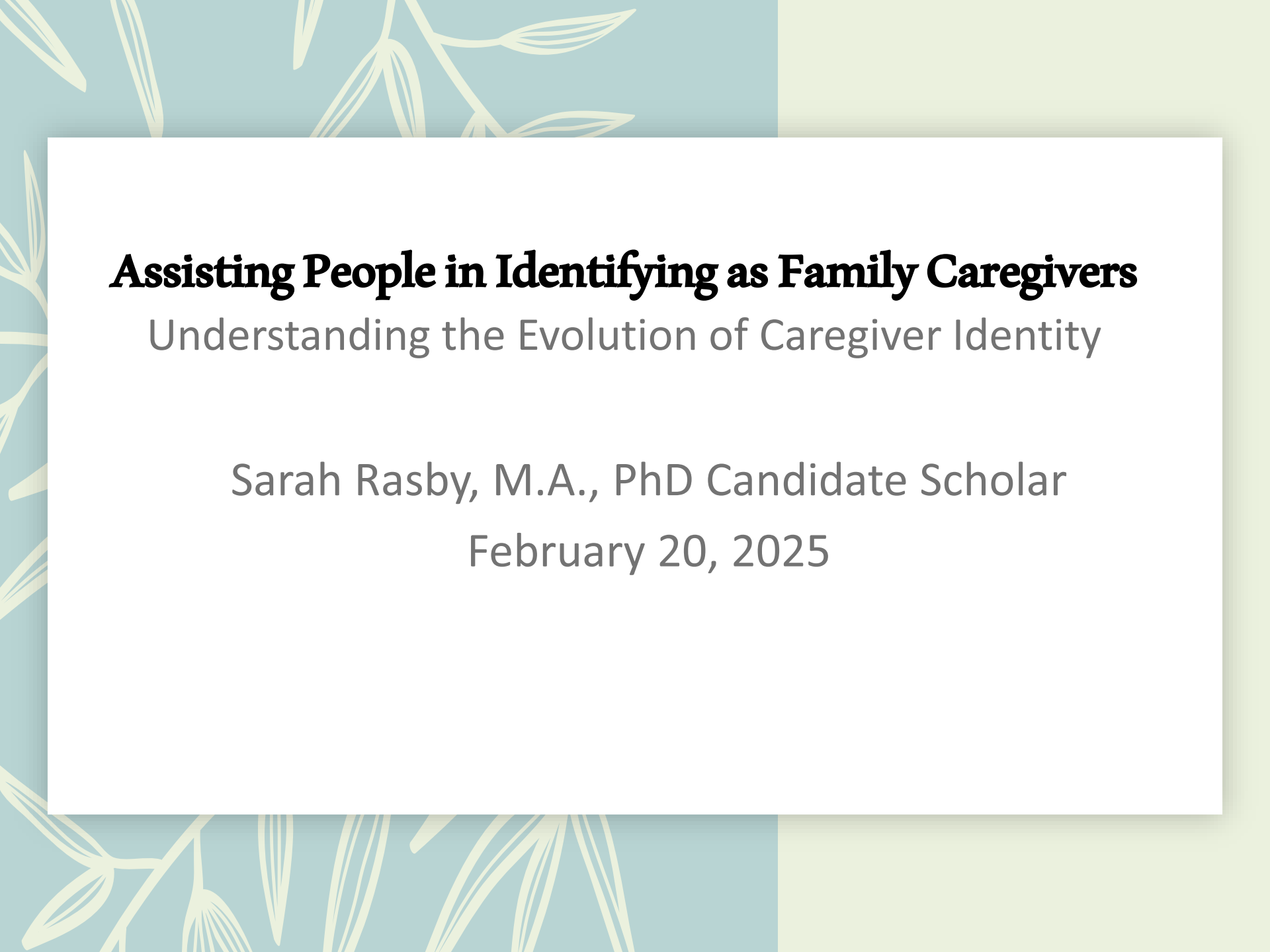




Assisting People in Identifying as Family Caregivers

Understanding the Evolution of Caregiver Identity

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Introduction

Who is a caregiver?

- Provides unpaid support to someone with illness, disability, or aging needs.

Why is caregiver identity important?

- Many do not self-identify, leading to stress and underutilized resources.

Purpose of this session:

- Explore caregiver identity evolution.
- Understand challenges.
- Provide strategies for self-identification and support.



The Importance of Caregiver Identity

Caregiver identity affects:

- Emotional well-being and burnout.
- Willingness to seek support.
- Relationship dynamics.

Lack of identification leads to:

- Delayed resource access.
- Higher burden and social isolation.

Caregiver Identity Theory

Phases of Development

1. *Role Onset* – Care begins, but no self-identification.



2. *Recognition of Responsibility* – Duties increase, identity still tied to previous roles.

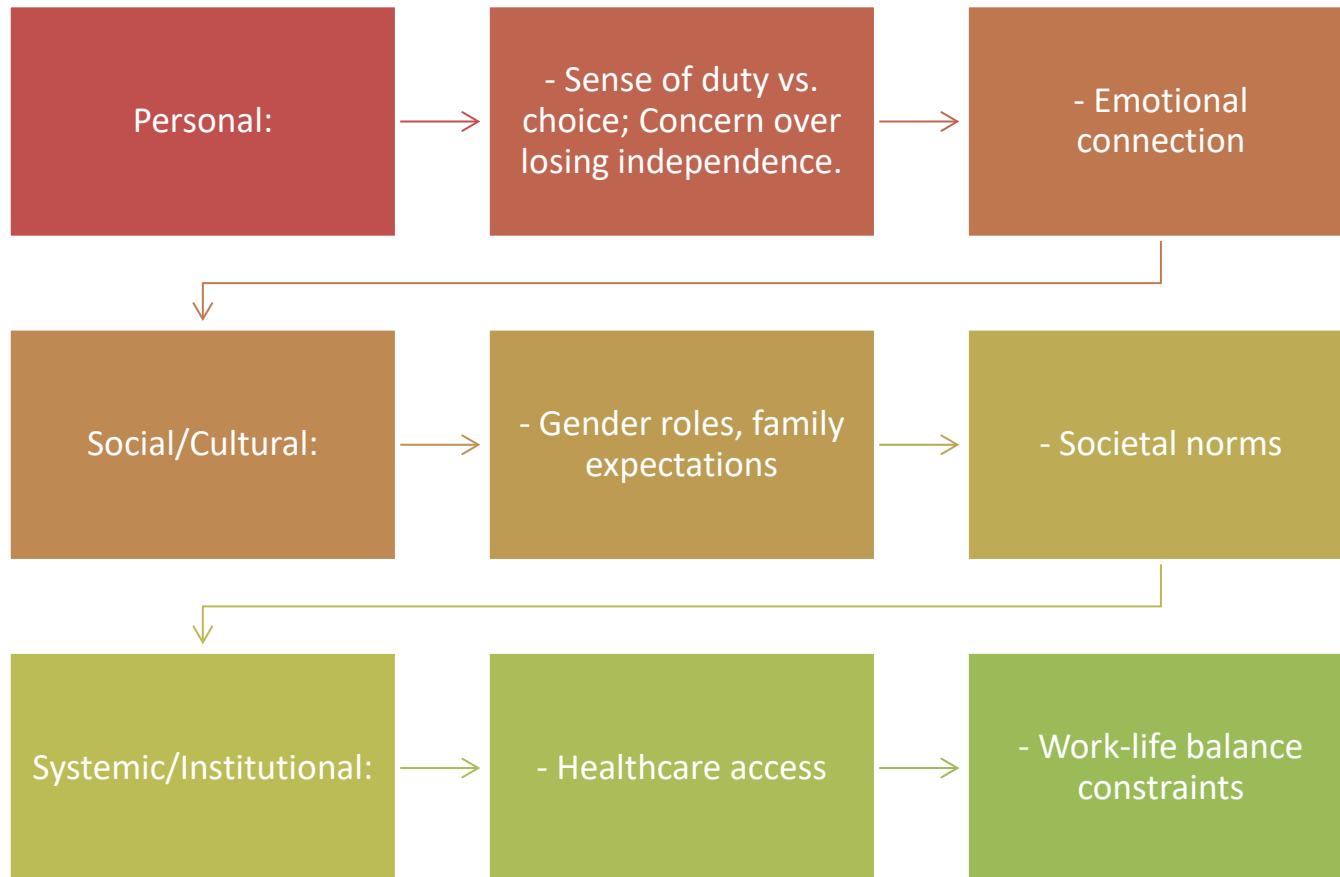


3. *Caregiver Identity Emergence* – Caregiving dominates roles.



4. *Caregiver Master Identity* – Caregiving is central to self-concept.

Factors Affecting Caregiver Identity



Challenges in Identifying as a Caregiver

RESEARCH INSIGHTS:

MANY DON'T SEE THEMSELVES AS CAREGIVERS.

FEAR OF LABELS, FEELING UNDESERVING.

IDENTITY DISRUPTION CREATES STRESS AND BURNOUT.

The Emotional Experience of Caregiving

Four Caregiver Identities (Cooper, 2021):

1. The Prisoner –
Feels trapped.

2. The Crumbling
Caregiver –
Overwhelmed.

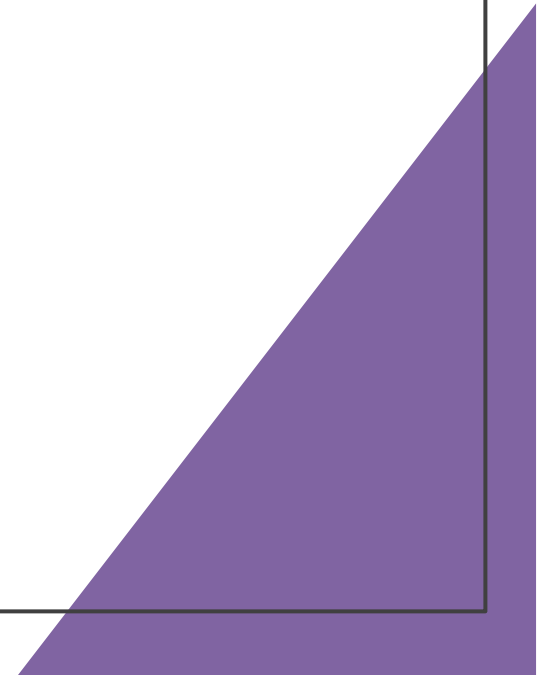
3. The
Companionate
Caregiver – Finds
meaning.

4. The Redeemed
Caregiver – Grows
personally.

Narrative Sense-Making & Identity Construction

How storytelling helps:

- Sharing experiences aids self-recognition.
- Positive framing reduces distress.
- Identity shifts over time.



Impact of Self-Identification

Support-Seeking Self-identification leads to:



- Higher use of respite care.



- Increased financial/social support.



- Policy advocacy.

Strategies to Encourage Caregiver Identity

1

Normalize the term
“caregiver.”

2

Encourage naming
caregiving roles
and experiences.

3

Use storytelling
and shared
experiences.

4

Educate on
available
resources.

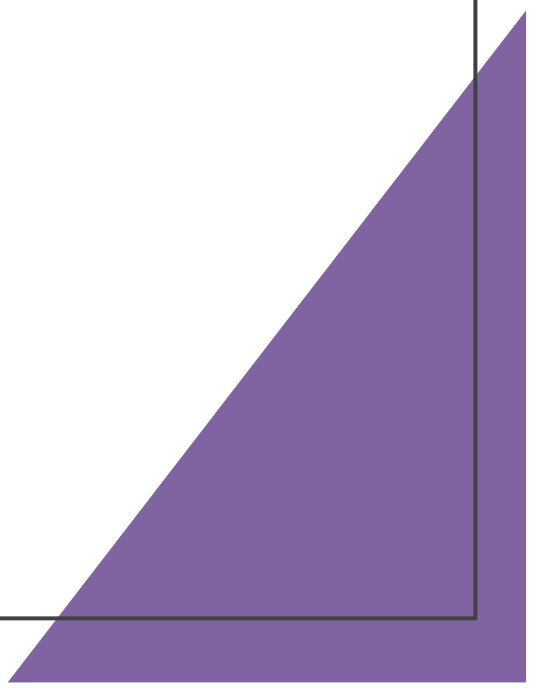
Case Study Example

Scenario: Daughter caring for aging parent but doesn't identify as a caregiver.

Barriers:

- Views it as “just family duty.”
- Feels guilt acknowledging burden.

How to assist:

- Reframe caregiving as an important role.
 - Introduce support groups/resources.
 - Encourage self-care reflection.
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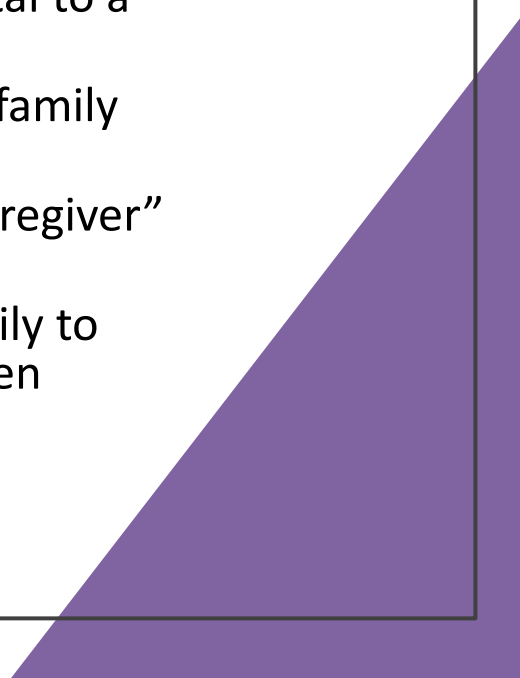
Role of Health Professionals & Caregiver Advocates

How professionals can help:

- Use person-centered language.
 - Provide self-assessment tools.
 - Address emotional/psychological needs in consultations.
 - Help reduce stigma by collaborating in medical, professional and community spaces.
- 

Shifting from “ME” to “WE” identity: the Care Unit

The Family Impact Lens of Caregiving:

- Also known as the *Family Impact Framework*, is based on the principle that strong and vibrant families are vital to a thriving society.
 - Addresses the caregiving experience for the entire family instead of just the primary caregiver.
 - Why does the onus need to rest on the primary “caregiver” only?
 - Reform policy and support systems around the family to balance out collective responsibilities and strengthen family engagement.
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Discussion & Reflection Activity

Group Questions:

- Have you known someone unaware they were a caregiver?
 - What strategies help people identify as caregivers?
 - What misconceptions exist about caregiving?
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Conclusion & Key Takeaways

Caregiving is an evolving identity.

Self-identification leads to support and well-being.

Communities can facilitate identity recognition.

Final Thoughts & Resources

Caregiver Support Organizations:

- AARP Family Caregiving
- National Alliance for Caregiving
- Rosalynn Carter Institute (The Carter Institute)

Further Reading:

- Eifert et al. (2015) - Family Caregiver Identity.
- Cooper (2021) - Sense-Making in Caregiving.